

benefits, higher education, business licenses in about 2 dozen fields, and even the right of self-defense.

Mr. Speaker, I call on the House to pass H.R. 274 to show that this chamber and our Nation support the Baha'i people and stand with them in the face of Iran's tyranny.

PROSTATE CANCER DISPARITY

(Mr. PAYNE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, this morning I met with the Prostate Health Education Network and leaders from across the country who are on the frontlines of the fight against prostate cancer.

It is critical for African American men and their families that leaders like us raise awareness and funding to end the racial disparity in prostate cancer research.

African American men are more likely to get prostate cancer, are diagnosed at more advanced stages, and are twice as likely to die as our Caucasian counterparts.

Fighting cancer requires sustained efforts at all levels to raise awareness to ensure individuals and their families have quality and affordable access to screening and treatment.

It is critical that Congress continues putting resources toward ending racial disparity in prostate cancer and healthcare more generally.

THANKING MEMBERS OF CONGRESS FOR EXPRESSING THEIR CONCERN

(Ms. FOXX asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, the public often has the impression that we in Congress are not caring people who work together on issues. I want to say to the American people that in the last few days, you could not find a group of people more concerned about their fellow Members than we have here.

We know this hurricane is hitting North Carolina, it is likely to hit South Carolina and possibly Georgia, and I want people to know how much I appreciate Members on both sides of the aisle who have come up to me to ask what impact this is going to have on me, on my district, on the people of my district, and on North Carolina in general.

It is very heartwarming to have those concerns expressed. People have said, "We are praying for you."

I know that is the case throughout the country, but I want to particularly say to all of my colleagues—I thanked them all personally—but to all of my colleagues, those who haven't spoken to me but have spoken to other Members, thank you very much for your concerns and prayers. I certainly will pass those along to my constituents,

but I think it is important that people know we care a great deal about each other and we express that to each other.

SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MAST). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Arizona (Ms. SINEMA) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of our country's veterans, who make great sacrifices to keep America safe.

When they return home from service, it is our responsibility to ensure they receive the care and support of a grateful Nation. For far too many veterans, that responsibility is not fulfilled. The government's failure has tragic consequences for those struggling with mental health illnesses.

September is Suicide Prevention Month. Americans across the country take time to raise awareness about the tragedy of suicide. We lose an estimated 20 veterans to suicide each day, and that is unacceptable.

Every year since I have been in Congress, we have brought together Republicans and Democrats to draw attention to veteran suicide and send a clear message that this epidemic must end.

Honoring our commitment to veterans is not a partisan issue. We know the only way to achieve real, lasting change for our Nation's bravest men and women is to bring both parties together to solve this problem.

Today, Members from both sides of the aisle have joined me to bring awareness to veteran suicide and we are working together to find solutions. I know we can make bipartisan progress, because we have done it before. We have shown it is possible for both parties to work together to improve veterans' mental healthcare.

After hearing the tragic story of a young Arizona veteran who lost his life to suicide in 2013, my team worked across the aisle to pass a bill that improved lifesaving VA mental health services for veterans with classified experience. It took 3 years of hard work, but our bill is now law, and it helps veterans successfully transition to civilian life.

It is important progress, but there is still so much work left to do.

We must serve our bravest men and women, just as they have served us.

We challenge the VA, the Department of Defense, and our fellow lawmakers to join us in confronting the tragedy of veteran suicide. We must do more to honor our commitment to American's veterans.

Today and every day, we stand with military families who have lost a loved one to the tragedy of suicide, and we say to you, your family's sacrifice will not be forgotten. We will not stop until every veteran receives the care that he or she needs.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. FITZPATRICK), my friend and colleague, and I am grateful to be joined this afternoon in this Special Order for his comments.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak of a solemn topic, one of utmost importance for sure, and I want to thank my colleague and my friend, KYRSTEN SINEMA from Arizona, and for all the work that she is doing for the veterans' community and for hosting this Special Order.

Mr. Speaker, our Nation's veterans are our finest citizens, to whom we owe the most. Their sacrifice in defense of freedom allows us to stand here today in this chamber, a testament to our values and a symbol of hope.

All too often, we see our Nation's veterans struggle upon their return home. Issues with depression, substance abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder serve as constant reminders of the price they paid to protect our way of life.

□ 1630

Tragically, we have seen a rising percentage of these heroes resorting to taking their own lives. This is beyond unacceptable and statistics paint a grim picture of this epidemic.

Between 2005 and 2015, Mr. Speaker, suicide rates for all veterans increased by 25 percent—25 percent between 2005 and 2015. Additionally, veterans account for nearly 15 percent of suicides in U.S. adults.

Mr. Speaker, we can do better, and we must do better. I am proud to stand here today with my colleagues in solidarity against veteran suicide. I am thankful for the establishment of the third Veterans Crisis Line call center to provide guidance, support, and critical resources to those in need. While steps are being taken to prevent veteran suicide, we still have a long way to go because one hero's death is one too many.

As Congresswoman KYRSTEN SINEMA had pointed out, Mr. Speaker, September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, but this issue will continue to transcend any time frame. For those who sacrificed for us, we owe them and will continue to fight to eradicate this public health crisis of veteran suicide.

Mr. Speaker, I want to, once again, thank Congresswoman SINEMA for hosting this Special Order.

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Speaker, for many veterans, the return to civilian life can feel overwhelming. Ensuring enough community support and mental health resources are available is essential.

We recently heard from Andrew, who lives in Chandler, Arizona. He joined the Marine Corps at 17 years old when he said he was "full of motivation and excitement" to serve. "I wanted to do my part to protect America," Andrew said.

As an antitank assaultman, Andrew fought beside incredible marines in Iraq, and when he finally returned

home, he said he returned with memories of death. Andrew leaned on loved ones and his faith to pull him out of his darkness.

Ever since, he has continued his healing journey by serving his fellow veterans. He presses forward with the values instilled on him by the Marine Corps: honor, courage, and commitment.

Responsibility to care for our veterans belongs to all of us. That is why we are working with those who interact with veterans each and every day: letter carriers, librarians, grocery store clerks, and academic advisers. We are giving community members the tools they need to support veterans every day right where they live and work. We are also working to increase the number of peer supports available to veterans.

There are veterans like Andrew who used their experiences, struggles, and accomplishments to help fellow veterans successfully navigate the transition to civilian life.

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to have a colleague and friend of mine joining us in this Special Order this evening.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from New Hampshire (Ms. KUSTER), my friend.

Ms. KUSTER of New Hampshire. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Congresswoman for yielding and for hosting this Special Order on this important issue.

Every single day, we ask the men and women who serve our Nation in uniform to make incredible sacrifices on behalf of our Nation, and they never fail to deliver for us.

These brave Americans and their families know the true meaning of service, but that service often comes at a price. Our men and women in uniform, our veterans, cannot be cast aside once they have returned home. The prevalence of suicide among servicemembers and veterans is a stain on our collective conscience.

Servicemembers throughout the history of our country have had harrowing experiences in their service to defend this country and protect our way of life.

But it has only been recently that the scope of the trauma of war has been truly understood. Since the time of Abraham Lincoln, we, as a country, have made a solemn vow to care for those who have borne the battle, a vow that has made caring for veterans one of the few bipartisan issues in this era of divisiveness in Washington.

Today, we must ensure that our solemn promise to veterans extends to effective mental healthcare. No veteran should ever have to wait for this type of care, which can be just as crucial for recovery as physical health services.

My father, Malcolm McLane, flew fighter planes during World War II. He was shot down in the Battle of the Bulge, and spent 6 months in a German POW camp. When I was a child, he rarely spoke about his experiences during the war, but now, in hindsight, I be-

lieve that he was experiencing what we now know to be PTSD.

We understand so much more today about the brain and the impact of trauma that so many of our servicemembers endure, and it is critical that the VA and our society use that knowledge to improve care for veterans when they return home.

We must ensure that the unseen wounds of war receive the attention they deserve. Many of us today voted to fund veterans' mental health and suicide prevention programs. And while it is commendable that Congress is taking important steps to address this issue, much more needs to be done to ensure that no veteran is left behind.

As a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I fight for the men and women who fight for us. During National Suicide Awareness Prevention Month, we should all pledge to work together to ensure that no veteran ever has trouble accessing the mental health services that he or she needs and deserves.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman from Arizona, KYRSTEN SINEMA, for her commitment to this issue. She was very effective in the testimony that she brought to the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and I appreciate her perseverance.

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MAST), my friend and colleague. I thank the Congressman so much for the work that he has done to join us today. I appreciate it.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, I guess I found in my time that suicide is an epidemic of purpose, and worth, and value.

I come to this line of thought because I have had countless veterans call me; reach out to my office; find me on Facebook; find me on some other form of social media; had a member of their family call my office or reach out, a mother, or a spouse, and talk about the fact that their veteran wants to take their life.

And in seeing that play out time and time again, I realize each and every time that somebody is out there searching for their value in their life. They are searching for where is their value? Where is their worth to the rest of the world? And for me, that helps me to recognize that this can be prevented.

I think veterans face this challenge in a unique way and in an elevated way, not because the challenge of war or recovering from injury is something that cannot be overcome. I think most of us end up finding in our lives that when we have overcome something incredibly difficult, those are the most memorable and purposeful moments of our life.

No person, veteran included, should have to believe that their greatest contribution to the world, or to their Nation, or to their family, or their community is something that is behind them.

That is something that is especially difficult for a veteran to overcome be-

cause their worth, and their value, and their work every single day was tied directly to serving all of those things at the highest possible level, serving their brothers and their sisters to their left and right, knowing that on any given day, they might have the opportunity to save a life, to save the life of one of their closest friends that they could ever have in life, a friend that would be willing to do absolutely everything for them, to include sacrificing their own life for that friend of them.

It is hard to replicate, maybe impossible to replicate, that purpose, and that worth, and that value. And I believe that it is in that that we find such a challenge to overcome suicide with our veterans because of everything that they have already given this country, and the drive, and the determination, and the will, and the intestinal fortitude inside of our veterans to want to go out there and find the next greatest thing in life, the next greatest way to serve.

That is the difficult challenge that we find ourselves trying to overcome. In having so many veterans reach out to me, I have learned this about veteran suicide. Each of them who were prevented from taking their life have said that there was nothing I could do, if somebody else didn't reach out to them. Because I could have not known anybody else that they could have told, that they didn't tell, they wouldn't have known.

It is in that that I believe it is important that we as veterans make a commitment to one another about being there for one another; about the fact that we had an oath that we never leave a fallen comrade. We always used to say, we always place the mission first, and that mission doesn't end when we take off that uniform. That mission, that commitment to one another, has to continue.

As veterans, we make it a point to put the most important things that we care about in word, in verse, things that we memorize. Whether it is the Soldier's Creed, or the Ranger Creed, or the Special Forces Creed, or some other ethos that we recognize as part of our service. We put it in words and we speak about it, and we say it time, and time, and time again.

And that is why I believe that it is important that we as veterans make known in word our commitment to one another; that we are never going to let one of our brothers or sisters be left behind; that our commitment to one another never ends; that we are never going to allow one of them to bring harm to themselves; that our love for each other never ends.

That willingness of what we would go out there and do for one another on the battlefield has no time limit on it, has no fuse. It will never be a wick that burns down. That has to be our commitment to one another, to demonstrate that kind of love and caring for each other as veterans. It is the only solution that I have been able to

find in my life toward helping with this one veteran, one person at a time, one commitment at a time, a commitment that never ends, and a commitment that has no limits to it.

I believe all of our veterans want that and are capable of that, and I am proud of every one of them for that commitment that I know they have inside of them.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Arizona (Ms. SINEMA) for holding this Special Order.

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to thank my colleague and friend, Congressman MAST. While he spoke very eloquently about his fellow veterans, and commitment to service, and leaving no man behind, he is very humble, and didn't share all of his own experiences.

Congressman MAST served as a staff sergeant in the United States Army and has earned a Bronze Star, Purple Heart, and many other awards for his bravery during battle. And when Congressman MAST joined Congress, I will never forget the first time we had a few moments to spend together, and I asked him about his own experiences in the military and since then, and the change that happened in his life after he was injured in battle defending our country.

I will never forget Congressman MAST's response, which is one of such strength and character, and, I believe, provides such inspiration to other men and women in our country, both those in uniform and those who have returned to civilian life as veterans.

I want to thank him for his service and for his incredible dedication to helping his fellow men and women who have returned home from battle as well.

Earlier in our Special Order, I mentioned the story of a young veteran in my district. His name was Sergeant Daniel Somers. Sergeant Somers was an Army veteran of two tours in Iraq. He served on Task Force Lightning, an intelligence unit. He ran over 400 combat missions as a machine gunner in the turret of a Humvee. Part of his role required him to interrogate dozens of terror suspects. His work was deemed classified.

Like many veterans, Daniel was haunted by the war when he returned home. He suffered from flashbacks, nightmares, depression, and additional symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, made worse by a traumatic brain injury. Daniel needed help.

He and his family asked for help, but, unfortunately, the VA enrolled Sergeant Somers in group therapy sessions, which he could not attend for fear of disclosing classified information.

□ 1645

Despite requests for individualized counseling, or some other reasonable accommodation to allow Sergeant Somers to receive appropriate care for his PTSD, the VA delayed providing

Sergeant Somers with support and appropriate care.

Like many, Sergeant Somers' isolation got worse when he transitioned to civilian life. He tried to provide for his family, but he was unable to work due to his disability.

Sergeant Somers struggled with the VA bureaucracy. His disability appeal had been pending for more than 2 years in the system without resolution. Sergeant Somers did not get the help he needed in time.

On June 10, 2013, Sergeant Somers wrote a letter to his family. I share a part of his letter every year here on the floor, in memory of Daniel's pain and in love for his family. In this letter, Daniel said: "I am not getting better, I am not going to get better, and I will most certainly deteriorate further as time goes on."

He goes on to say: "I am left with basically nothing. Too trapped in a war to be at peace, too damaged to be at war. Abandoned by those who would take the easy route, and a liability to those who stick it out—and thus deserve better. So you see, not only am I better off dead, but the world is better without me in it.

"This is what brought me to my actual final mission."

No one who returns home from serving our country should ever feel like he or she has nowhere to turn, which is why I am committed to continuing to work on both sides of the aisle to ensure that no veteran ever feels trapped like Sergeant Somers did and that all of our veterans have access to appropriate mental healthcare.

But Sergeant Somers' story is too familiar to many military families. His parents, Howard and Jean, were devastated by the loss of their son, but they bravely shared Sergeant Somers' story and created a mission of their own.

Their mission is to ensure that their son's memory brought to light America's deadliest war: the 20 veterans that we lose every day to suicide.

Many of my colleagues here in Washington have met with Howard and Jean. They are working with Congress and the VA to share their experiences with the VA healthcare system and find ways to improve care for veterans and their families.

We worked very closely with Howard and Jean to develop and sign into law the Sergeant Daniel Somers Classified Veterans Access to Care Act. This is a law that ensures that veterans like Daniel, who have had classified or sensitive experiences, can access appropriate mental health services at the VA.

Our law directs the Secretary of the VA to establish standards and procedures to ensure that any veteran who participated in classified missions or served in a sensitive setting may access mental healthcare that fully accommodates his or her obligation to not improperly disclose classified information.

The law also directs the Secretary to disseminate guidance to employees of the Veterans Health Administration, including mental health professionals, on standards and procedures about how to best engage veterans during the course of mental health treatment with respect to classified information.

Finally, our law directs the Secretary to allow veterans with classified experiences to self-identify, so they can quickly receive care in an appropriate setting.

But that victory is just one small step forward. We still have so much work left to do.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for joining us this evening to talk about the scourge of veteran suicide. This is our sixth year of hosting this Special Order in a bipartisan way together. I look forward to the year when we do not need this Special Order because we have ended the crisis of veteran suicide in our country.

Until such time, I pledge to continue working with my colleagues to not just tell the stories of veterans who are struggling, veterans who have made it, or veterans we have lost, but to celebrate our victory of overcoming this crisis and ending this scourge.

Mr. Speaker, I yield the balance of my time to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. HILL), my friend, who is going to share some of his thoughts and close out our Special Order hour. I thank Congressman HILL for joining us this evening.

Mr. HILL. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Arizona (Ms. SINEMA), my good friend, for yielding. She and I have the pleasure of serving on the House Financial Services Committee together and cooperating on many legislative measures and regulatory measures that benefit our economy, so I thank her for that work. I greatly appreciate her stepping up and reaching out across the aisle on the subject of suicide, particularly during Suicide Prevention Month, and letting all of us have an opportunity to share our perspective on this national tragedy.

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. There is an average of 123 suicides per day. What could be more tragic than that?

Yet, I don't see nearly the people on the floor tonight that there should be, because this affects all our districts so tragically. One in five are suffering with some form of mental illness in our country, a problem that has disrupted so many families, caused too much violence and pain, and caused far too many lives. Representative SINEMA and I talk about this every time the subject comes up.

When I was a high school senior, I can't remember a friend that was a victim of suicide. But, Mr. Speaker, my kids just turned 19 and 21, and within 4 or 5 years of their ages, I can think of six families who have lost a child to suicide—different reasons, same tragedy. So our families are hurting from the scourge of suicide.

In Congress, this is an area where we work together, the 21st Century Cures Act, where we attacked the first comprehensive approach to mental illness treatment in decades, where we say we want people with mental illness and who need treatment to get it. We worked together most recently on the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Act for American veterans, and the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act—small steps, but concrete steps that call attention to suicide, particularly in our veterans community.

The VA is helping on this issue and marked Suicide Prevention Month with its Be There campaign. This campaign highlights the risk factors and warning signs for suicide, provides information about VA mental health and suicide prevention resources, and helps individuals and organizations start the conversation around veteran mental health in their communities.

Our VA employees must have the necessary resources to offer guidance to veterans while providing essential suicide prevention services.

This is a together thing. This is an “all of us in this together” thing.

Mr. Speaker, I have a chair in my front office in my district office in Little Rock that was hand-painted to raise money for suicide awareness and suicide prevention. On that chair, it says: “We Are The 22.” This is a non-profit organization in my community started by veterans helping veterans, because it is not an “us and they” thing. It is an “us” thing. It is a “we” thing.

We are all in this together. We are the 22, the number that we have as the estimate of veterans who are taking their own lives.

So I want to echo the Speaker pro tempore this afternoon, a distinguished American and distinguished veteran and brave, heroic representative of our Armed Forces, our patriots, the people who defend our liberties, when he said we don't leave people behind. We don't leave a sailor, a marine, or a soldier on the battlefield. We bring them home.

Just last week, we honored John McCain on the floor of this House. And SAM JOHNSON, leaving the House this year—Representative SCHWEIKERT was there—he was in the Hanoi Hilton with John McCain. We don't leave a man or woman behind on the battlefield. But when they come home, we equally should not leave them behind.

I really commend the Speaker's comments that the mission is not over. All of us have that partnership and sense of duty to carry that mission forward on the home front when we are out of harm's way and out of theater.

To me, it is that buddy system that we all learn, whether it is in boot camp or swim team, you team up; you check in on each other; you don't leave people alone. That is the secret, I think, to preventing suicide.

I lost a good friend of mine, a fraternity brother, a partner in a law firm in Houston, Texas. He never once inti-

mated to his wife, to his children, or to his law partners that anything was wrong, and they got the call that he had been found.

Check in: How are you doing?

So we are the 22. We are on the buddy system. We don't leave our warriors behind. The mission continues here. All those things are true.

I carry in my wallet, Mr. Speaker, the veterans crisis hotline as a reminder to me that we want our veterans to reach out if there is a moment of crisis.

If somebody is watching this or hearing the words of brave BRIAN MAST, or the emotional content and leadership of Representative KYRSTEN SINEMA from Arizona, and you are having that moment now as a veteran, I urge you to call 1-800-273-8255 for yourself, for a friend, for a neighbor.

We, in Congress, are fighting to make sure that that veterans hotline is a value, that it is answered, and that we are part of that thin thread of connectivity between all of us that keeps us right on the moment.

Mr. Speaker, I see my friend from Arizona is here. It was a pleasure to have both of my friends from Arizona talk about their senior Senator last week, John McCain, and what he meant to each of us and what he has meant to our country.

Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to yield to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. SCHWEIKERT), my friend, now on the House Ways and Means Committee, formerly of the best committee in the House, the House Financial Services Committee.

Mr. SCHWEIKERT. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. HILL for yielding. And to the gentlewoman from Arizona, I thank her for doing this every year.

This is one of those moments where you are walking toward the microphone because we just got out of votes in Ways and Means, and you are sort of discussing in your head whether you ultimately tell the personal story. I have two I want to share.

My reason for doing this is, if someone is watching, we have someone in our life, and you are having self-destructive thoughts, please, please reach out, get the help, and understand the devastation that happens and the pain that happens when someone takes their life.

My two stories. When I very first got elected in the Phoenix-Scottsdale area, one of the very first constituent meetings I had was with a mom. Her son had been part of the Phoenix VA. She always felt that the prescriptions he was given put him into an emotional spiral.

They kept trying to get him mental health services. They felt all that he was receiving was more prescriptions and a future date for mental health services. And he took his life.

That mother, the pain, the tears, the crushing blow, what the loss of her son's life meant to that family.

I believe now, a few years later, the Phoenix VA is better. They have

learned a lot, they understand how to be almost a quick reaction force in helping an individual. But we need to make sure these things never happen again.

Now for the personal one that I have never told in public.

□ 1700

I was born in an unwed mothers' home in L.A. I was adopted. It turns out the gentleman who adopted me had multiple sclerosis. But he was a veteran, and he was receiving his medical treatments from VA.

This is a long, long time ago, but this is about the pain that comes when a veteran takes his or her life.

Because of the pharmaceuticals he was given, the lack of emotional counseling, and the failure to properly diagnose his disease, he put himself in a car in a garage, turned on the motor, and took his life. That was my dad.

Some time later, my mother remarried Mr. Schweikert. I got readopted, and I was blessed to grow up in a wonderful household that had brought me to Arizona.

Many years later when I was a young adult, my mom sat me down and told me the story. You could tell there was still that burning hole in her heart of finding her husband, my dad, dead in that car, having taken his own life, believing it was the failure of the very services he was receiving from the VA.

Now it is decades later, and I believe we have learned a lot. This body has tried as hard as it can to get their heads around: Are we allowing too many pharmaceuticals to be prescribed? Are we not providing emotional services? Do we need to put resources into having that communal get-together, the quick reaction force?

I believe it is getting better.

But understand the pain that Mom shared with me when I was first elected about the loss of her son. Even these many, many years later, it is still part of our family's legacy of that pain. If this body can do anything, if we can find ways to make that pain come to an end, then we will have done something very honorable and very powerful.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. HILL for yielding to me.

Mr. HILL. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Arizona for participating, and I thank his colleague, Representative SINEMA, for her heartfelt tribute that she has carried on since she has been in the House to bring attention to suicide prevention.

I also commend the House for the efforts that it has taken on mental health and on suicide prevention, particularly for our veterans.

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

HONORING THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF RON ROBINSON

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. HILL) is recognized for 60